

**MANDATORY REFERRAL REPORT NO. 12-16**

**Proposed Acquisition of 7738 N. Tryon Street from Mecklenburg County for LYNX Blue Line Extension (BLE)**

**PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:**

The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) is implementing a Right-Of-Way (ROW) Acquisition and Relocation Program for the LYNX BLE (Blue Line Extension) Light Rail Project. The Project includes the construction of a light rail system between Uptown Charlotte and the University of North Carolina Charlotte. The corridor will be approximately 9.4 miles in length with 11 station locations. The Project alignment will primarily be within or along North Carolina Railroad (NCRR), Norfolk Southern Railroad (NSRR), North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), and University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC) rights-of-way. Also included in the Project are Park and Ride facilities to accommodate the commuting public. Implementation of the Northeast Corridor Light Rail Project will facilitate the following improvements:

- Reduced vehicular traffic and congestion in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg County area;
- Increased transit travel options;
- Improved air quality in the metropolitan area.

The entire BLE project property acquisition was approved through the Mandatory Referral process and the Planning Committee in May of 2011 (MR10-15). At the time of the approval a Mecklenburg County owned parcel - 7738 N. Tryon Street (Parcel 04924105) - was proposed to be a partial acquisition for the purpose of widening North Tryon Street to incorporate the BLE into the median. Upon more detailed design and coordination with Duke Power, the BLE will now need to utilize the entire site of County Parcel 04924105, making this a full acquisition.

More specifically, three factors are driving the need to acquire the entire parcel. First, Duke Energy requires vertical clearance between their transmission lines leading from the adjoining substation and the BLE overhead power (catenary) lines. Second, Duke also has requirements for how close grading can take place to their existing transmission towers. These two factors require the relocation of transmission towers onto the County Site. Finally, given the surrounding topography, a driveway needs to be constructed on the County parcel in order to re-establish the existing driveway off Tryon Street that will be eliminated as part of the BLE development. .

The 1.18-acre parcel is vacant and zoned B-2 Business according to the Charlotte Zoning Ordinance. It is surrounded by properties under various business uses, including a Duke Energy electrical substation immediately to the north.

**PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:**

The purpose of the proposed LYNX Blue Line Extension is to ensure future mobility by providing a transportation alternative in a highly congested travel corridor and to support the region's land use policies and goals for a sustainable growth and development pattern. The proposed project would provide high-capacity, fixed guideway transit service in the corridor. This new service would offer a convenient, time-competitive travel alternative and reduce dependence on single occupant automobiles. As an extension of the LYNX Blue Line, the proposed project would enhance the operating effectiveness of CATS' light rail service and leverage the public investment already made in the South Corridor.

The project would also support the *Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework*, 2010, for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region. As envisioned in the region's combined transit and land use plans, future development would be focused into areas that can support new development or are in need of redevelopment and away from areas that cannot support new growth. The highest density development would be encouraged around rapid transit stations. By focusing future growth in corridors with multiple travel alternatives, the region would be able to grow in a manner that promotes continued access and mobility and that enhances the quality of life for residents and employees.

**CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:**

In 1994, the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County adopted the *Centers and Corridors Concept Plan*, a vision of how the region should grow over the long-term. The Concept Plan, updated in 2010, and now called the *Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework*, builds on the region's existing framework of centers and corridors, focusing future development in these areas and preserving lower density development and open space between corridors. The original document focused on "Centers" and "Corridors" as the key to integrating land uses and transportation. The updated document includes recommendations for areas that exist between the corridors known as "Wedges" and expands the focus to include public facilities, infrastructure and the environment. Plan recommendations include a future, fixed guideway transit system in the region's five primary transportation corridors. This new rapid transit system would provide travel choices for residents and employees, improve regional and corridor connectivity, reduce dependence on single-occupant vehicles, and ensure future mobility. The Northeast Corridor (LYNX BLE) is one of the five corridors identified in the *Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework*.

**CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:**

The BLE lies within several adopted land use plans including the *Northeast District Plan* (1996), the *Central District Plan* (1993) and the *University City Area Plan* (UCAP) (2007). Concept plans for the proposed stations have been completed and station area plans have been adopted for four stations in the UCAP. Station area planning for the Parkwood through Tom Hunter stations will kick-off this fall. The district plans did not reference the transit project and the concept plans are used to determine appropriate land uses within station areas. Plan amendments will be completed for the stations that have been modified within the UCAP.

**PROJECT IMPACT:**

This transit project will provide new transit choices and development options. Construction of this project will provide additional opportunities for transit oriented development within the Northeast Corridor.

**RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PROJECTS:**

The LYNX BLE is well coordinated with several public (City, County and State) and private projects. The following is a list of those projects and their sponsors:

NC29/NC49 Weave Project (Charlotte Department of Transportation)

Greenways (Mecklenburg County Department of Park & Recreation)

Charlotte Railroad Improvement & Safety Program (CRISP) (NC Department of Transportation Rail Division):

- Sugar Creek Grade Separation
- 36<sup>th</sup> Street Grade Separation
- AC&W Relocation
- Freight Railroad Double Tracking
- Northend Bypass

UNC Charlotte Master Plan (UNCC)

First Ward Park Master Plan (Private Development)

**ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:**

The LYNX BLE has secured a state Full Funding Grant Agreement, a Record of Decision, and will be approved to enter into Final Design in July of 2012. A Federal Full Funding Grant Agreement is anticipated in December of 2012. The BLE is currently in the property acquisition stage, construction is anticipated to begin in 2013, and revenue operations are scheduled to begin in 2017.

**JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:**

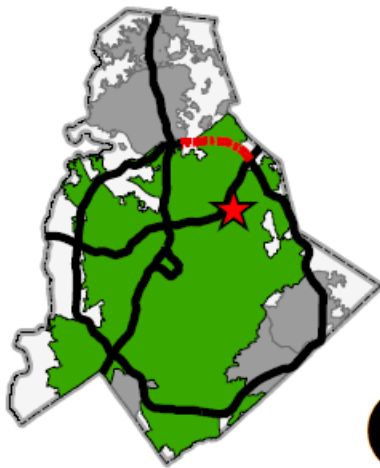
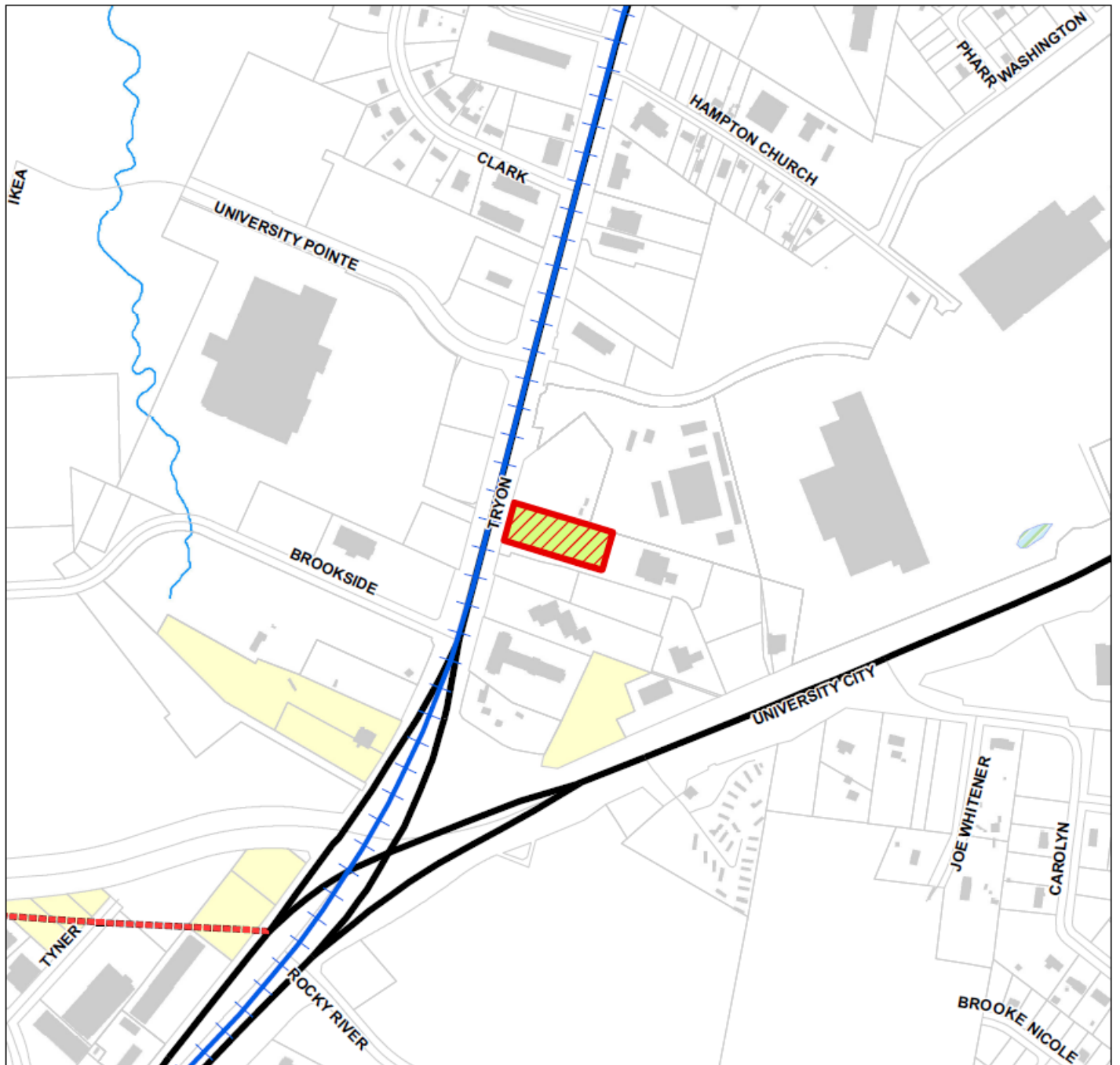
The Joint Use Task Force discussed this matter at their June 27, 2012 meeting and no joint use comments were offered.

**PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Planning staff recommends approval of the full parcel acquisition.


**CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:**


At their July 17, 2012 meeting the Planning Committee recommended approval by a 7-0 vote.





## Mandatory Referral 12-16

Submitted & Initiated by: CATS

 Mandatory Referral

 County Property

 City Property

 Blue Line Extension



Produced by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department